LESSON PLANS

PAINTED PORTRAITS

Grade Levels: 7–8
Estimated Time: 3 hours

Introduction:
During the 18th century many successful merchants and businessmen in the American colonies commissioned artists to paint their portrait. Colonial artists strove to portray their subjects in the sophisticated style used in English portraits, but there were relatively few British paintings in America at this time for American artists to study. Instead, artists like John Singleton Copley and his peers studied mezzotint reproductions of English portraits.

Copley's portraits of American colonists such as Mrs. Daniel Hubbard (Mary Greene) (see page 17) identify the sitters with England while indicating their profession and social status through painted details. In this lesson, students will examine the painting and discuss how this is evident. They will research and discuss the origins of the American colonies and explore how colonists were influenced by English culture. As a follow-up project, students will produce a portrait of an individual, including attributes that provide information about the tastes and ambitions of the sitter.

Lesson Objectives:
• Compare and critically analyze works of art, considering especially how attributes or symbols reveal social status in colonial America.
• Learn about the American colonies and the importation of culture from England.
• Learn to conduct research using the Web.
• Create a portrait that incorporates attributes and interests of the sitter.

Key Terms:
• colony
• mezzotint
• class
• portrait
• symbol
• sitter

Instructional Materials:
• pencils
• notebook paper
• drawing paper
• colored pens, colored pencils, or paint
• brushes
• water
Procedures:
Discussion:
- Using image 1 or the enclosed CD, have students examine the painting. Ask: What visual evidence in the portrait of Mrs. Daniel Hubbard makes the case for her social and economic status? (clothing, hairstyle, objects related to leisure activity). Help by first asking students to consider how people exhibit their wealth and status in images of themselves today.
- Do people ever use images to project an inaccurate view of themselves?
- Explain that the background and props in the portrait serve as symbols of Mrs. Hubbard’s lifestyle in 18th-century America. Ask students to identify these props and to imagine what they signal about the sitter. For example:
  - Sketches for a needlework pattern rest on the pedestal in Mrs. Hubbard’s portrait, suggesting that she enjoyed an activity considered appropriate for women of her social class.
  - The costly fabrics worn by Mrs. Hubbard, including silk and lace, indicate her wealth.
- Encourage students to explore texture in the painting, for example, the fabric worn by the sitters or the skin on their face and hands. Ask how the artist convincingly simulated these various textures.

Activity:
Divide students into groups and have them conduct research about the American colonists using the Internet or a textbook chapter in an American history text of your choice.

Questions include:
- Define *colony*.
- What do you think are some of the reasons that people left England for the colonies?
- How do you think the colonists felt about living so far from England?
- If you were a colonist, what kinds of things would you have brought from your home country?
- Can you think of people today who move to a new place but continue to practice the traditions of the country or region where they came from? (e.g., moving from the southern to the northern United States, emigrating from Mexico to the United States).
- Why might people do this?

Discussion:
Return to Copley’s painting and tell students about his method of using European mezzotints as the basis for his American portraits. Ask:
- Why do you think Mrs. Hubbard would want to be portrayed like an English noblewoman?
- Why would Copley want to paint portraits that looked like English art? (Use the information on page 17 to answer these questions for the students.)
Evaluation:
Base students’ evaluations on their participation in class discussion, ability to describe and analyze a work of art, and identification of the decisions that colonists made in order to be identified as both an American colonist and be associated with England.

Follow-Up:
- Have students create a portrait of someone who is known to them (such as a friend or parent). Encourage them to consider the environment in which they will place their sitter, what clothes he or she will wear, and what other attributes they will include to signal the sitter’s interests and identity. Ask them to consider whether or not they will rely on a particular kind of imagery (in art, advertising, etc.) that appeals to the tastes of their sitter.
- Challenge students to imagine that they are portraitists living in America during the 1700s and they have to paint a portrait of one historical or fictional individual from the Revolutionary period. Encourage students to choose people of various social classes and ethnic backgrounds (such as farmers, slaves, merchants, traders, artisans, Native Americans). Have each student gather information relating to their character. Ask them to produce a portrait containing several attributes and to write a brief biography or short story about the individual in their painting.

Illinois Learning Standards:
Language Arts 4, 5
Social Science: 16, 18
Fine Arts: 25, 26, 27

For more detailed information on the Illinois Learning Standards, see http://www.isbe.state.il.us/iis/